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A New Paradigm: “The Middle Ages without Catharism” and the Testimony of the Inquisitorial Sources

ABSTRACT

The article discusses the radical interpretation of Catharism which is getting more and more popular in the recent years. It's adherents assume, that this heresy never existed for real in the regions of contemporary southern France, but was only a construct of the Catholic clergymen. In their opinion the image of well-organized and doctrinally consistent heresy was created by the Catholic polemist, basing on the ancient anti-heretical writings (mainly anti-manichaean scriptures of St. Augustine) and than it was imposed on the innocent people questioned during an inquisitorial procedure. The adherents of this interpretation (based on the interpretation of inquisitorial sources) propose a total change in the perception of Catharism, and writing it's history anew, to fit a new paradigm—“Middle-Ages without Catharism.” The main aim of this article is to verify these revolutionary claims, basing on the analysis of the inquisitorial sources and to answer the following questions: Can we really say, that the image of Catharism in the inquisitorial sources is identical as in the Catholic polemics? Can we assume, that it was imposed on the interrogated people by the inquisitors? And finally—is it really an image of the well-organized counter-church?

KEYWORDS: Catharism, inquisition, medieval dualism

STRESZCZENIE

Nowy paradygmat – „średniowiecze bez kataryzmu” a świadectwo źródeł inkwizycyjnych

Artykuł podejmuje dyskusję z coraz popularniejszą w ostatnich czasach radykalną opcją interpretacyjną kataryzmu, której zwolennicy zakładają, że herezja ta nie istniała nigdy realnie na południu dzisiejszej Francji, będąc jedynie konstruktem katolickich duchownych. Obraz dobrze zorganizowanej i spójnej doktrynalnie herezji dualistycznej miał zostać stworzony przez polemistów katolickich na podstawie starożytnych pism antyheretyckich (głównie

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antymanichejskich św. Augustyna), a następnie wmówiony niewinnym przesłuchiwanym podczas procedury inkwizycyjnej. Zwolennicy tej interpretacji (opartej na rozumieniu źródeł inkwizycyjnych) proponują całkowitą zmianę spojrzenia na kataryzm, napisanie jego historii od nowa i zastąpienie dotychczasowych ustaleń nowym paradygmatem – „średniowiecze bez kataryzmu”. Głównym celem artykułu jest weryfikacja tych śmiałych twierdzeń na podstawie analizy źródeł inkwizycyjnych i udzielenie odpowiedzi na pytania: Czy faktycznie obraz kataryzmu w nich zawarty pokrywa się z obrazem znanym z katolickich polemik? Czy można odnieść wrażenie, że został on narzucony przesłuchiwanym przez inkwizytorów? Czy jest to obraz dobrze zorganizowanego kontr-Kościoła, jak utrzymują zwolennicy wyżej opisanej interpretacji.

SŁOWA KLUCZE: kataryzm, inkwizycja, dualizm średniowieczny

Modern historiographers of Catharism take two lines of interpretation which are so radically different that, as the British scholar R.I. Moore claims, there is no chance of reconciling them (2016, p. 273). The first, traditionalist one assumes that Catharism was a dualistic heresy with Eastern—Bogomil and Paulician roots, while the latter negates both the dualistic character and Eastern provenance of Catharism and—in its most radical form—claims that this heresy did not exist at all. One of the most representative skeptics of the former camp is the Australian scholar Mark Gregory Pegg, who from the beginning of the 21st century has consistently proclaimed that Catharism did not exist at all in the south of today's France, and urges for the abandonment of the traditionalist view, accusing its supporters of staying anchored in old, invalid thought patterns, and of neglecting new discoveries. Deeply convinced that his approach is correct, Pegg unswervingly calls for a rewrite of the history of Catharism, or even—as he says—for a revolution that will overthrow the current paradigm by introducing a new one: the Middle Ages without Catharism (2001a; 2001b, pp. 181–195; 2011, pp. 577–600; 2016, pp. 21–35, 52).

On hearing such bold proclamations, someone unfamiliar with the subject of this heresy may conclude that the Australian scholar has come across some new source materials which completely invalidate the previous findings. The truth, however, is quite to the contrary: the entirety of Pegg's "revolutionary discovery" is that he based his research on early Inquisitional sources: the registers of Bernard of Caux and Jean of St. Pierre, who questioned over 5,500 people in Toulouse between 1245 and 1246, trying to establish the degree of their involvement in heresy. Since most of those accused had had nothing to do with Catharism, or at best belonged to a group of simple, uninitiated believers—*credentes*—they

were unacquainted with Cathar dualist ideas, leading Pegg to arrive at the conclusion that dualism played no part in this heresy. According to his interpretation, during later interrogations the Inquisitors—using a false image of heresy fabricated by Catholic polemicists—allegedly imposed it on the suspects thus contributing to the perpetuation of the false image of Catharism as a well-organized and doctrinally defined dualistic heresy (Pegg, 2016, pp. 37–49). As we can see, Pegg did not find any new sources that could stand as the basis for a radical reinterpretation of Catharism. The very concept that the heresy was conjured out of nothing by the Catholic Church was not new either, as it had been developed since 1998 by French scholars led by Monique Zerner, who, in turn, based on the vision of Catharism formulated by R. Morghen in the 1950s, believed Catharism to be an evangelical movement which sought to restore original Christianity and was condemned as dissident by the Catholic Church (Morghen, 1951, pp. 212–224; 1966, pp. 1–16; Zerner, 1988; Moore, pp. 11–26, 64–68, 111–116; Brenon, 1995, pp. 31–36). Representatives of the Church, taking harsh measures to suppress this internally unorganized and doctrinally vague movement, and attempting to justify the repressions against it, were said to arbitrarily attribute to its followers the errors from anti-heretical ancient works (including primarily the Antimanichean writings of St. Augustine) and to invent the eastern origins of heresy, creating the image of a well-organized heretical counter-church (e.g., Biget, 2001, pp. 39–44, 46–51; Jiménez, 2002, pp. 204–217; Jiménez-Sánchez, 2003, pp. 38–39, 58–60; Zerner, 2001, p. 55; Théry, 2002, pp. 98–101). However, the criticism of French scholars such as Zerner, Biget, Théry, or Jiménez was directed mainly against polemical treatises of Catholic authors, while Pegg's entire revolutionary novelty was to apply the same deconstructionist methodology (based on an unsubstantiated premise of the heresy being a Catholic forgery) to Inquisitional sources, assuming that over time the Inquisitors began impressing this image upon the people they were interrogating (Pegg, 2016, pp. 39–49).

This groundbreaking approach of Pegg and his followers,¹ as well as all deconstructionist interpretation, has recently been the subject of increasingly severe criticism. Some scholars argue that the historians gathered around this trend make categorical judgments about the whole of Catharism, while relying on very limited source material, which additionally was selected in such a way as to fit into previously made assumptions, and ignoring the sources that are inconvenient for them (Biller, 2016,

1 Young scientists such as H. Chiu agree with Pegg's interpretation (see Chiu, 2011, pp. 495–501), as do experienced scholars as R.I. Moore (2012, pp. 201, 219, 254–257, 282–289; 2016, pp. 258–270).

pp. 275–277, 280–304; Feuchter, 2016, pp. 113–115, 129; Arnold, 2016, pp. 56–77; Stoyanov, 2016, p. 174; Drakopoulos, 2010, p. 20). J.H. Arnold, specifically, refutes the conviction that the Inquisitors imposed key elements of Catharism on the suspects, rightly stressing that they rarely appear in Inquisition registers (2016, p. 66). The tactic chosen by Pegg and his followers was also criticized by the Czech scholar D. Zbiral, who states that examining only the extant Inquisitorial sources gives an incomplete and one-sided picture, because there was a gulf between the Catharism of simple believers (*credentes*) and the Catharism of the perfects (*perfecti*) (Zbiral, 2019, pp. 74–86).

It seems that the groundbreaking interpretations of Pegg and Moore have gained some popularity among scholars of Catharism mainly because in their very general formulations these authors refer to Inquisitorial sources which are very extensive, and therefore it is not an easy task to verify them.² However, since their accusations against the traditional image of Catharism are very serious, it seems that it is worth making the effort and basing on the evidence of Inquisitorial sources to verify the main assumptions underlying this interpretive revolution, which posits that the Inquisitors imposed on the people they interrogated the image of Catharism fabricated by Catholic polemicists as a well-organized dualist counter-church, when in reality such a thing as Catharism did not exist in what is now southern France. Therefore, it is worth looking at firstly to what extent the image of Catharism contained in Inquisition records coincides with what we know from Catholic polemics; secondly, whether these sources make the impression that the Inquisitors imposed it on the subjects; and thirdly, whether it is indeed an image of an organized counter-church.

As far as Inquisitorial sources are concerned, in Languedoc, an area where, according to the deconstructionist interpretation, dualism was not supposed to exist, an exceptional number of registers have survived, mainly thanks to Jean de Doat's commission operating in the time of Louis XIV, whose members copied the extensive archives of southwestern France in the period 1665–1670 (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, pp. 20–26). The first very valuable source is the above-mentioned registers of the interrogation conducted by Bernard de Caux and Jean of St. Pierre in Toulouse immediately after the fall of the Qatar fortress of Montsegur in 1245–1246, with the testimonies of over 5,500 people (Duvernoy, n.d., pp. 2–5). Other preserved registers, not issued in print until 2011, also come from Toulouse, but from a later period (1273–1282), and contain the testimonies of people questioned by Inquisitors Pons of Parnac and Ranulf of Plassac.

2 The Fournier records alone are 1,500 pages long in the contemporary edition; the sentences of Bernard Gui are of similar length. For references to the editions of these sources, see below.

(For more on the source, see also Biller & Bruschi, 2011, pp. 3–14.) What survived from the beginning of the 14th century, i.e., the period of the last revival of Catharism, which was sparked by the Autier brothers, were the registers of the hearings from the Sabarthes region, led by Godfrid of Ablis (1308–1309), as well as the book of Inquisitorial sentences of the famous Bernard Gui, who was the Inquisitor of Toulouse between 1307 and 1323 (Duvernoy, 1980, pp. 2–4). Unfortunately, the records from his investigation have been lost, but the book of sentences, kept in the British Library, was published in the beginning of the 21st century (Pales-Gobil-liard, 2002, pp. 7–13). Probably the most famous registers were those of Jacques Fournier, the bishop of Pamiers and later Pope Benedict XII, from 1318 to 1325 and edited as early as 1965 by Jean Duvernoy.³ Such an ample and informative source database, covering 80 years of the history of Catharism in southern France allows for the revolutionary concepts promoted by M.G. Pegg and other scholars of the revisionist trend to be verified.

As for the first of the above-mentioned sources—the registers of Bernard de Caux and Jean de St. Pierre, the information on the doctrinal faith of the suspects is remarkably laconic and schematic, reflecting the standard questions asked by Inquisitors who followed the interrogatories. Most often, they recited the formula that the accused had

heard heretical errors about the fact that God did not create visible things, that Catholic baptism does not contribute to salvation, that the consecrated host is not the Body of Christ, that there is no resurrection of the dead nor salvation in marriage, and that they believed heretics are good people and have good faith that leads to salvation (Duvernoy, 1988, p. 86, see also pp. 44, 58, 62, 80, 91, 95, 96, and 148; in the case of Duvernoy, n.d., this phrasing is in the accounts of most of the people questioned).

It is noteworthy, however, that not all formulas were identical, because in many cases the faithful either had not heard of the Cathar teachings at all, or had heard only about some of them, while even those who had usually did not believe in them. Many interrogated men and women did not believe at all in the dualistic teachings of the Cathars, even though they knew of them; however, this did not change the fact that they believed the Cathar *perfecti* were friends of God, and that the only sacrament they conferred—*consolamentum*—leads to salvation.⁴ This considerable

3 About the source, its author, and the circumstances in which it was found, see Duvernoy, 1965, pp. 8–31.

4 “Item dixit quod credebat h. Esse bonos homines et habere bonam fidem et esse veraces et amicos Dei. Et audivit h. Dicentes quod Deus non fecerat visibilia. Sed i.t non credidit predicto

variety of responses, as well as the fact that all of them, including the quite inconsistent ones, were meticulously recorded by the Inquisitors, clearly demonstrates that they did not want to impose a predetermined pattern of dualist beliefs on anyone. If the Inquisitors had actually intended to falsify the truth by presenting Catharism as an organized counter-church which professed dualism, then in most cases we would see identical formulas, which would imply that every person who was questioned knew the whole heretical doctrine very well and, in addition, believed in it, while the cases of people who did not believe in dualism but acknowledged the spiritual guidance of the Cathar *perfecti* and their sacrament would have been discarded. Likewise, those versions of the dualistic doctrine that do not fit the formulas contained in the Catholic polemics should have been ignored, while several such examples are found in the records of Bernard de Caux and Jean de St. Pierre. The testimony of one of the subjects questioned contains a myth that is completely illogical from the point of view of "Cathar orthodoxy" known from the polemics. It says that the material world was entrusted by God himself to Lucibel, who rebelled and decided to take full power over it.⁵ In another we find a description of the creation of man, in which God willingly helps the devil by placing a soul in the body that he had created and giving advice on how to mold man so that he does not become too powerful.⁶ In both cases, we are dealing with concepts whose patterns cannot be found in polemics, as they contradict all known versions of the Cathar doctrine. There is no mention in any of them that God gives the devil power over the material world, since this would mean that he is indirectly responsible for evil.

As we can see, the picture of Catharism that appears in the registers of Bernard de Caux and Jean of St. Pierre is very far from the well-organized dualist counter-church that the deconstructionists talk about. The interrogated faithful had very little awareness of the doctrine, and the only thing they had in common with Catharism was the belief that the *perfecti* were good people who administered effective sacraments guaranteeing

errori" (Duvernoy, n.d., Vol. 1, p. 6; see also pp. 9, 15, 19, and 117, and Vol. 2, pp. 50, 203, and 229).

- 5 "Quadam die dum predicaret Dominus in celo gentibus suis, venit ei nuncius de terra dicens ei quod istum mundum amiserat, nisi statim mitteret illuc. Et statim Dominus misit Lucibel in hunc mundum, et recepit eum pro fratre, et postea voluit Lucibel habere partem hereditatis de inferioribus et de superioribus, et Dominus noluit. Et propter hoc diu fuit guerra, et hodie est inter ipsos, et propter aliam superbiam" (Duvernoy, 1988, p. 26).
- 6 "Diabolus fecit hominem de terra argili, et dixit Deo quod mitteret animam in hominem. Et Deus dixit diabolo: 'Fortior erit me et te si de argila fiat. Sed fac eum de limo maris.' Et fecit diabolus hominem de limo maris, et Deus dixit: 'iste est bonus, non est enim nimis fortis nec nimis debilis.' Et misit Deus animam in hominem" (Duvernoy, 1988, p. 50).

salvation. The only exception is the testimony of Pierre Garcias: a high-ranking bourgeois from Toulouse brought up in a Cathar family who endured 25 years in heretical faith and did not abandon it, even in the face of death. The doctrine he professed was fully consistent with what Catholic polemicists described (see Alain de Lille, n.d., col. 308–376; Durandus de Huesca, 1967, pp. 12–257; Guillelmus de Nangiac, 1840, pp. 48, 741; Stubbs, 1869, pp. 158–159): he believed in the existence of two eternal gods—one good and one evil—he identified the evil, material creation with the *nihil* from the prologue of the Gospel of St. John and human souls with angels fallen from heaven. He also rejected the belief in the real body of Christ and the resurrection of bodies, while recognizing reincarnation (Douais, 1900, pp. 92–94, 102–104). As can be observed, the example of Garcias precisely corresponds to the concept of the deconstructionists; however, the problem is that this is only the exception that proves the rule.

The next source, chronologically speaking—the Protocols of Pons of Parnac and Ranulf of Plassac—shows a very similar image of Catharism as that emerging from the records of Bernard de Caux and Jean of St. Pierre. Here too, it is difficult to say the “fabricated” dualist doctrine was imparted on those questioned. Scarcely three people had ever heard of the theological dualism of two opposing gods, good and evil, but even they did not share the belief.⁷ Only three witnesses heard that the devil had created the material world, and only one of them believed it (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, pp. 190, 414, 506). The same was true for the anthropological dimension of dualism (i.e., the teaching that the devil created the human body, whereas God created the soul)⁸ as well as for ethics: here, only two people knew that carnal sin is considered a sin under all circumstances by the Cathars (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, pp. 266, 308). The accused were much more familiar with Cathar ecclesiology and sacramentology. Many of them proclaimed in their testimonies that only the Cathar Church is the true church and that salvation can be achieved through it, and they perceived the Cathar *perfecti* as martyrs persecuted by the Catholic clergy, who they deemed to be false prophets.⁹ Some of them also undermined the validity of

7 “Interrogatus utrum ipse testis credit esse verum illud quod dictus Garnerius dicebat, videlicet quod essent duo dii, unus benignus et alter malignus, ut prædictum est, dixit quod non” (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, p. 548; see also pp. 632 and 670).

8 Also, the folk myth known from the previous source appears here; it speaks of the collaboration between God and the devil in creating man: “Lucifer fecerat hominem, et Deus dixit ei quod faceret eum loqui. Ipse vero respondit quod non poterat, et tunc Deus inspiravit in os hominis, et locutus est homo” (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, p. 264; see also pp. 306 and 308).

9 “Hæreticos credidit esse bonos homines et veraces, et habere bonam fidem, et posse salvari per eos” (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, pp. 246; see also pp. 176, 178, 346, 678, and 941). Some of those questioned openly claimed that the Catholic Church did not preach the true faith (Biller

the Catholic sacraments, maintaining that baptism by water does not bring salvation and that the consecrated host is not the body of Christ (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, pp. 264, 346, 652, 654, 658). Nevertheless, people who were aware of these presuppositions of the doctrine constituted a small margin in comparison to all of the suspects.

The information contained in both of the above-described sources vividly demonstrated that it is completely unfounded to assume, as the deconstructionist scholars do, that Inquisitors imposed the dualistic doctrines known from polemics upon the people they interrogated in order to perpetuate the image of an organized counter-church, thus justifying the persecution of “dissidents” who did not fit in with the framework of the Church that was built after the reform. P. Biller and C. Bruschi, editors of the registers of Pons of Parnac and Ranulf of Plassac, also oppose such an interpretation. They claim that the Inquisitors were not concerned with imposing adherence to dualistic teachings on the men and women they questioned. The most important thing was to establish any contact the accused had with heretics and to classify them as *fautor*, *celator*, *occultator*, *receptator*, or *defensor* (Biller & Bruschi, 2011, 6671). In other words, to be found guilty it was enough for a person to be in touch with the Cathars, meet with them, perform the greeting ritual called *melioramentum*, support them financially, or provide them shelter. It was not in the interest of the Inquisitors to prove the dualistic beliefs to their subjects; therefore, as is evident from the sources, they did not seek to do so.

A slightly different, less chaotic image of Catharism transpires from another source, namely, Bernard Gui’s *Liber Sententiarum*. Here, the knowledge of the doctrine even among simple believers seems to be slightly higher than in the previously discussed records. Four Cathar believers (*credentes*) condemned by this Inquisitor professed dualism on the level of theology and cosmology, as well as docetic Christology. They also renounced the Catholic sacraments and recognized only the baptism of the Holy Spirit which was performed by Cathars (Gui, 2002, Vol. 1, pp. 194, 682–684, 778, Vol. 2, p. 1116). Thus, it can be claimed that they knew all the key elements of the Cathar doctrine. The knowledge of the next twenty accused people was limited only to elements of the sacramentology or ecclesiology

& Bruschi, 2011, pp. 302, 640). For more on the Cathars as martyrs, see Biller & Bruschi: “Illi quos persequeretur Ecclesia Romana tenebant meliorem vitam quam aliæ gentes, et quod peccatum erat quia Ecclesia Romana eos persequeretur” (2011, p. 280) and “Et dixit dictus Bernardus dicto testi quod ita erat hodie sicut antiquitus, quod boni homines persequerentur a malis. Dixit etiam dictus Bernardus quod Minores et Prædicatores erant illi de quibus loquitur Dominus in evangelio, dicens ‘Attendite a falsis prophetis.’ Et tunc et dictus testis dicens, quod imo erant hæretici, respondit Bernardus prædictus quod imo erant Prædicatores et Minores, qui persequerentur bonos homines” (2011, p. 208).

(a rejection of Catholic sacraments and recognition of the Cathar community as the only true church), and the belief that the Cathars are good people who are able to ensure salvation.¹⁰ Bernard Gui, however, not only dealt with the simple believers, but he also managed to capture and condemn some high-standing *perfecti*: Pierre Raymond of Saint-Papoul, Amiel d'Auterive, and even the famous Pierre Autier. As is easy to guess, they all had full knowledge of the doctrine, matching the descriptions known from polemical sources (Gui, 2002, Vol. 1, pp. 326–328, 538–540, 846–848).

As the sentences of Bernard Gui reveal an image of Catharism which is more doctrinally aware and much less chaotic than in the other registers, can we conclude that this is evidence that over time Inquisitors became more involved in shaping the understanding of Catharism as a well-organized dualistic church, as deconstructionist scholars wish? Drawing such far-reaching conclusions seems unsubstantiated, due to the peculiarities of the source as a book of sentences, which shows only a certain group of people who stubbornly adhered to their heretical views, and there have always been very few such followers. It can be assumed that if the records of the interrogations conducted by Bernard Gui were also found, it would turn out that the picture of Catharism represented therein does not differ much from the previous ones. The information in the book of sentences issued by this Inquisitor, however, seems to confirm—contrary to the deconstructionist interpretation—the truth of the Cathar doctrine described in the polemic sources. What leads us to this conclusion is the fact that the Cathar testimonies overlap with the accounts of polemicists who very often (as was the case, for example, with Eckbert of Schönau [Eckbertus 1855, col. 13–14], Alain de Lille [Barber, 2006, p. 128] or Durand of Huesca [Durandus de Huesca 1967, pp. 35, 98, 149; Wakefield, 1967, p. 291]) acquired their knowledge of the heretical doctrine during disputes with *perfecti*.

When we look at the records of an Inquisitor from a similar time period from the region of Sabarthes: Godfrid of Ablis, we can see that the image of Catharism contained in this source is as chaotic as before. The awareness of the doctrine among the interrogated *credentes* is just as low, mostly boiling down to the belief that the Cathars are saintly people who can ensure salvation, unlike the Catholic Church, which is not the church of God and therefore has ineffective sacraments.¹¹ Only two people had heard of the

10 The most common formula was as follows: “Item quod credidit tunc hereticos esse bonos homines et veraces et habere bonam fidem et posse salvari in fide eorum” (Gui, 2002, Vol. 1, p. 180; see also Vol. 1, pp. 210, 264, 434, 446, 586, 680, and 740 and pp. 514, 516, 528, 646, 704, 916, as well as Vol. 2, p. 1260).

11 “... credidit ipsos esse bonos homines et habere et tenere bonam vitam et credebatur salvari per eos et in fide eorum” (Duvernoy, 1980, p. 33; see also pp. 28, 29, 42, 48–49, 52, 54, 58–60, 64, 70, 72, 75, 77, 80, 81, 84, 88–90, 98, 103, 110, and 133).

existence of two opposing gods, good and evil, one of whom, presumably, believed the doctrine (Duvernoy, 1980, pp. 58, 90). Only three suspects had ever heard of the belief that material creation does not come from God, and another one was familiar with the commonly known identification of human souls with the angels fallen from heaven (Duvernoy, 1980, pp. 24, 121, 137). Of all those questioned, only one person had any knowledge of most of the key elements of the Cathar doctrine (Duvernoy, 1980, p. 58). Evidently, the records of Godfrid of Ablis belie the “revolutionary” revisionist theory about the great campaign to manufacture a dualistic Cathar heresy, in which Inquisitors were allegedly actively involved.

We should look closely at the next source, i.e., the registers of Jacques Fournier, as they contain much more ample, much more detailed information than the previous ones. This is due to the Bishop of Pamiers’s different style of investigation, which was much less rigid than the others. Fournier, unlike previous Inquisitors, did not limit himself to asking questions according to interrogatories, but allowed the confessing subjects to speak much more, trying to thoroughly learn their beliefs in order to pass a fair sentence (Duvernoy, 1965, pp. 19–20). The most striking in the Fournier’s registers is that far more people than in previous records knew and even professed dualism, both on the theological and cosmological levels. Moreover, they were introduced to these teachings during the perfects’ sermons (e.g., Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 1, pp. 281, 283, 472, Vol. 2, p. 179). However, only a few accused men and women represented the dualistic teachings in the “orthodox” form, i.e., as we know it from polemics, or talked about the existence of two eternal gods, good and evil, the first of whom created everything that is eternal and spiritual, while the other created everything that is transient and material.¹² The vast majority of them misrepresented the Cathar teachings by adding their own elements to them or reinterpreting them so thoroughly that it completely distorted their meaning. The common denominator of these “folk” versions of the doctrine was a clear reluctance to accept the Cathar dogma according to which the entire material world, including all plants, animals, and human bodies, was created by Satan. Therefore, many of the faithful modified the Cathar teachings in such a way that they ascribed to the good God creation of those things which they considered good, and to Satan those which they thought were evil. A certain Bernard Franc, who admitted recognition of

12 “Item dixit quod [...] Deus solum spiritus fecerat, et illud quod corrumpi et destrui non potest, quia opera Dei manent in eternum, sed omnia corpora que videntur et sentiuntur, scilicet celum et terra et omnia que in eis sunt, solis spiritibus exceptis, fecerat diabolus, gubernator mundi, et propter hoc quia diabolus ista fecerat, omnia corrumpebantur, qua ipse non poterat facere opus stabile et firmum” (Duvernoy, 1965, pp. 227–228; see also Vol. 1, pp. 230, 237, and 241 and Vol. 2, pp. 35–36).

two eternal, equally powerful gods, proclaimed that the good one created not only angels, human souls and heaven, but also earth, human bodies, and useful animals, while the evil one was responsible for calling to life demons, harmful animals (such as wolves, toads, mice, and snakes), and hailstorms, storms, and natural disasters in general.¹³ Another subject, Arnold Cogul, shared very similar views, and although he claimed that he had come to them on his own, there can be no doubt that they were strongly inspired by Cathar radical dualism. Like the radical Cathars, Cogul believed that God was unequivocally good, so he could not have created anything evil, and certainly could not have created the devil. As a consequence, the latter must have existed eternally as an independent being, not one created by God. However, this was where the consistency with Cathar orthodoxy ended, as the suspect also proclaimed that the wolf, which was an unambiguously evil animal (once a wolf had eaten his livestock), could not also have been created by God, and therefore the first wolf—the forefather of all wolves—was also an eternal being and not created by anyone.¹⁴

Very similar views, which showed a clear appreciation of the positive elements of the material world, but were completely contrary to Cathar orthodoxy and never present in Catholic polemics, were also expressed by other subjects, such as Jean Jauffre or Grazida Lizier (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 1, p. 304, Vol. 2, pp. 113–114). Quite surprisingly, compared to the previous sources, many simple believers knew the basic tenets of the Cathar

13 “Item dixit se credere et credidisse toto tempore supradicto quod sicut deus bonus fecit omnes bonas creaturas, sicut sunt angeli, anime humane bone, et corpora, celum, terram, aquas, ignem et aerem, et animalia utilia hominibus, vel ad comedendum vel ad portandum, laborandum, induendum, et pices etiam qui sunt utiles ad comedendum, ita deus malus fecit omnes demones et animalia nociva sicut sunt lupi, serpentes, buffones, musce, et omnia animalia nosciva et venenosa” (Duvernoy, 1965, p. 358). “Interrogatus si credebat grandines, fulgura, tempestates, esse factas a deo malo vel a deo bono, respondit se credidisse quod talia fiebant a diabolo vel a deo malo” (Duvernoy, 1965, p. 361).

14 “Arnaldus Cogul de Lordato dixisset et asseruisset coram multis quod Deus non fecerat diabolum nec lupum, nec alias res nocivas hominibus, et quod diabolus et lupus erant per se encia non facta ab aliquo alio [...]; [...] dixit et confessus fuit quod a sex annis citra ipse fuit in credencia quod quia Deus est bonus et simplex, in quo nulla malicia est nec esse potest, quod Deus ipse non fecit diabolum vel demones; et quia etiam ipse habebat vacas et oves, et aliquando lupus rapiebat et comedebat de dictis animalibus suis, credidit etiam per dictum tempus quod Deus tam maliciosum animal sicut lupus est non fecisset” (Duvernoy, 1965, p. 378). “Item dixit quod licet per dictum tempus ipse bene crederet quod unus lupus nunc alium lupum generat, tamen credidit quod a principio primus lupus per se fuit ens, non factus a quocumque alio, sed quod venit in mundum sic, quod nescitur unde venerit vel a quo missus fuerit, sed, ut dixit. credebat et adhuc credit quod omnia alia corpora et spiritus sicut sunt angeli boni, celum, terra, aque. corpora humana et generaliter omnia alia corpora et omnes alias res Deus fecerit” (Duvernoy, 1965, p. 378).

radical myth of the fall, according to which human souls are identical to angels (or spirits) who sinned in heaven at the beginning of the world inspired by Satan and were cast to the earth as punishment to do penance in their bodies (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 1, pp. 222, 228, 230, 241, 228, 240, 472, Vol. 2, pp. 179, 199, Vol. 3, p. 130). Also, in this case only the general assumptions coincide with the versions known from polemics, while the rest is completely different. The best example of this is the myth of the fall of heavenly spirits, which was repeated by several suspects independently of each other. According to the myth, the person responsible for the fall was Satan, an independent, eternal god of evil who reached the heaven of the good God along with the beautiful woman that he had brought with him, dressed in gold and other riches. She aroused unbridled lust in the angels, making them rush after her regardless of the consequences, and they fell from heaven to earth.¹⁵ Additionally, in Fournier's registers we can also find other versions which are equally absent in the polemics, assuming that God (or Christ) collaborated in reviving the human body which was created by the devil—and even those in which God, exactly as in the orthodox version, created Adam and Eve in body and soul (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 2, pp. 407–408, Vol. 3, p. 223, Vol. 2, p. 492).

As for other elements of doctrine, the faithful were no longer so bent on making their own modifications. Docetic Christology, which affirms that Christ did not have a natural body, and thus did not suffer and did not die on the cross, soteriology, which prioritized the transmission of the teachings and considered the negative attitude towards the Old Testament to be the work of the devil, and individual eschatology, which endorsed

15 "Invenitur quod Pater sanctus steterat in celo cum sanctis spiritibus in regno suo et gloria. Deinde Sathanas, inimicus Patris sancti, ut turbaret quietem Patris sancti et regnum eius, ivit ad portam regni Patris Sancti et stetit ad portam per XXXII annos. Non permittebatur intrare. Tandem quidam ianitor dicte porte, videns quod per longum tempus expectaverat ad portam et non fuerat adhuc permissus intrare introhivit illum in regnum Patris sancti. [...] Et incepit sollicitare spiritus bonos, dicens eis: 'Et non habetis aliam gloriam vel delectacionem nisi illum quam video vos habere?' Cui responderunt quod non, et tunc ipse dixit eis quod si vellet descendere ad mundum suum inferiorem et regnum, ipse maiora bona et maiores delectaciones eis daret quam eis dedisset Pater sanctus. Et cum boni spiritus peterent ab eo cuiusmodi bona eis daret, ipse respondit eis quod daret eis agros, vineas, aquas, prata, fructus, aurum, argentum et omnia bona huius modi sensibilis, et eciam cuilibet ipsorum uxores. Et tunc incepit laudare uxores multum et delectaciones carnales que cum uxore *haberent* [...] *et post* tempus adduxit mulierem pulcherrimam et formosam, auro et argento et lapidibus preciosis ornatam, et introduxit eam in regnum Patris et abscondit eam ne Pater sanctus eam videret. Et illam mulierem ostendit spiritibus bonis Dei Patris. Quam cum vidissent, inflammati concupiscencie eius, quilibet eorum eam habere volebat, quod videns Sathanas eduxit eam de regno Patris dictam mulierem, et spiritus, concupiscencia dicte mulieris illecti, sequi fuerunt dictum Sathanas et mulierem eius" (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 2, pp. 33–34; see also: Vol. 3, pp. 406–407, Vol. 2, p. 441, Vol. 2, pp. 472, 488–489, 508–509, Vol. 3, pp. 130–131, 219).

belief in reincarnation, all fully overlapped the Cathar doctrine known from Catholic polemics. It should be pointed out, however, that the subjects, although they knew these elements of the doctrine well, did not necessarily believe in them (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 1, pp. 228–231, 241, 282–283, 378–379, 456–457, 473, Vol. 2, pp. 178, 409, 504, 512–513, Vol. 3, pp. 132–133, 217, 224–227, 236). As in the earlier Inquisitorial records, the accused at Fournier were also best acquainted with Cathar ecclesiology and sacramentology, and confessed that the Cathar Church is the true church of God, where salvation can be achieved through the *consolamentum* sacrament (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 1, pp. 226, 228, 319, 241, 228, 463, 496, Vol. 3, pp. 133, 227–228). The *perfecti* who administered it, as the suspects maintained, fulfilled God’s commandments better than Catholic priests, followed the example of the apostles, and by dying in persecution they became martyrs.¹⁶ The ethical code that the faithful abided by in their lives also clearly differed from the ideal model presented in the polemics. This was especially true of their attitude towards marriage and carnal intercourse. Simple believers drew conclusions which were completely opposite than the intended by the *perfecti*, according to which carnal sin is just as bad if it is committed in marriage and outside of it, and treated it as an incentive to extramarital relations (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 1, pp. 224, 283).

Fournier’s highly detailed registers only confirm the conclusions drawn from the analysis of earlier sources, showing the whole assortment of attitudes held by the faithful towards the Cathar faith. Firstly, they show that the Catharism of the simple believers was diametrically opposed to what we know from polemics, and therefore that there can be no question of any attempts to impose the patterns drawn from polemics onto reality, as the deconstructionists argue. In fact, it is quite the opposite: the scrupulous record-keeping of various, often completely anti-orthodox versions of the doctrine testifies most positively to the diligence and honesty of the Inquisitors. Secondly, the picture of Catharism that emerges from the analysis of Fournier’s registers is directly contrary to the idea of a well-organized counter-church that could threaten the Catholic Church. We are not dealing here with a group of conscious believers, united by a common doctrine, moral principles, and awareness that they belong to the same organization. It is rather a chaotic set of individuals who arbitrarily create their own eclectic doctrines and their own moral principles on the basis of Cathar teachings, and whose beliefs were associated with the Cathar *perfecti* only

16 “Et tamen quia credebatur quod melius tenerent viam Dei dicti heretici quam catholici, idcirco credebatur quod maiorem potestatem haberent absolvendi peccata heretici quam catholici” (Duvernoy, 1965, Vol. 3, p. 231; see also Vol. 1, pp. 227, 230–231, 282–283, 319, 473).

in the hope of achieving salvation through the *consolamentum* sacrament that they conferred.

It appears that we could conclude that the revolutionary theories advocated by Pegg and his followers are unsupported. The Inquisitorial sources suggest that there can be no talk of the Inquisitors imposing any patterns taken from polemics; the image of Catharism contained within them is also very far from the idea of a heretical counter-church which could threaten Catholicism. The fact is, however, that the awareness of the doctrine among the believers, and especially of Cathar dualism, is surprisingly low in most sources (except for Fournier's registers). Does this mean that dualism, which is a distinctive feature of Catharism, did not actually play a large role in this heresy, or that it did not exist at all initially, appearing later and being exaggerated by the Inquisitors, as some scholars claim?¹⁷ The limited awareness of the doctrine among the accused does not lead to such far-reaching conclusions, mainly because the overwhelming majority of Inquisitorial registers contain the records of interrogations of simple believers (*credentes*) who were quite loosely linked with Catharism.

These sources contain an image of folk religion, which is always significantly different from the normative religion professed by the clergy. This rule applies to practically every religion, but in the case of Catharism it is especially conspicuous. While in Catholicism a person becomes a member of the Church through baptism by water received at the beginning of life, and then tightens his or her bond with the religion and institution (and also learns more about the doctrine) through regular religious practice and sacraments, in Catharism the situation is completely different. This is because there was only one sacrament—*consolamentum*—baptism by the Holy Spirit, which, combined the functions of several Catholic sacraments, i.e. baptism, penance, priest ordination, and the last anointment (Brenon, 1993, pp. 41–49). A person who received *consolamentum* (of course, only in adulthood, after a preparatory period of at least one year) firstly became a member of the Cathar Church (the only true Church of Christ, as preached by the Cathars), secondly gained the right to teach others, thus, de facto becoming Cathar clergy, and thirdly, was granted total absolution of all previous sins, ensuring his or her salvation (for more, see Thouzellier, 1977, pp. 222–258). On the one hand, there are the *perfecti* who through *consolamentum* were full-fledged members and priests of the Cathar church, and on the other hand, a mass of simple believers (*credentes*), who did not receive this sacrament, and their ties to

17 R.I. Moore places the emergence of dualism later, in the mid-thirteenth century (Moore, 2012, pp. 201–219, 282–289; 2016, p. 270), following the findings of Jiménez-Sánchez (2008, pp. 207–210).

the Cathar Church were incomparably weaker than those of the Catholic faithful to their community. The *perfecti* themselves made it clear that the simple faithful were not members of their church, forbidding them even to say the Lord’s Prayer and not revealing the full doctrine to them.¹⁸ Many Catholic authors, beginning with Eckbert of Schönau writing in 1163, explicitly state that the Cathar doctrine was secret (especially when it came to controversial teachings such as dualism or reincarnation) and was only disclosed to those who, after sufficient observation, proved to be trustworthy.¹⁹ This issue is clarified by Bernard Gui, who talks about several stages of initiation of the faithful into the heresy: in the first stage, the Cathars presented themselves as the successors of the apostles faithful to the evangelical ideals, who lead a holy life and for which they are persecuted by the Church; in the second stage—available to those who accepted the Cathar teachings—they proceeded to undermine the Catholic sacraments and emphasize the importance of their rite of baptism by the Holy Spirit, which was the only way to ensure salvation; only at the third stage, to which only the most trusted members were admitted, did they reveal their teachings on docetic Christology as well as dualistic cosmology and theology (Gui, 1964, pp. 22–27).²⁰ This was the case during most of the time of Catharism, and Bernard Gui’s stages are fully corroborated by the Inquisitorial sources discussed above, from which it is clear that the great majority of those involved in heresy were aware that the *perfecti* were holy men who followed the example of the apostles and who administered the sacrament that brings the faithful to salvation, while only some individuals were familiar with the dualistic teachings.

This analysis of Inquisitorial sources clearly shows that the views of deconstructionist scholars, who intend to revolutionize the understanding

18 The privilege of turning to God as the Father belonged only to the *perfecti* (see Thouzellier, 1977, p. 198).

19 “Dicite mihi, quando iniit hoc consilium Dominus, vellet esse absconditus in angulis vestris? Dicitis quoniam veritas Christianae fidei vobis solis sit nota, et apud vos solos abscondita” (Eckbertus Abbas Schonaugensis, 1855, col. 18). “Vos autem si estis, sicut dicitis, apostoli Christi, quare tanto tempore latuistis? Si vos estis Ecclesia Dei, ut dicitis, quare usque ad haec tempora semper in abscondito ambulastis? [...] Nam ab ipsis quoque qui veniunt ad vos, fidem vestram, ex qua salvandos vos esse speratis, et occulta opera vestra longo tempore, ut dicunt, quindecim annis occultatis, donec diu eos probaveritis, ita ut sperare possitis de eis quod non prodant vos” (Eckbertus Abbas Schonaugensis, 1855, col. 19). Other authors also emphasized that Cathar teaching was occult, especially on the issue of dualism: “Tercium per quod notari possunt est quia et doctrinam suam sophismatibus et involucionibus verborum occultant et in occultis predicant” (Etienne de Bourbon, 1877, p. 311). See also Goffredo di Auxerre, 1970, p. 210; Ermengaudus, 1855, col. 1235.

20 This scheme was also confirmed by the testimonies of the subjects who spoke about the content of the sermons delivered by the *perfecti* (see Duvernoy, 1980, p. 29).

of Catharism, are unsupported. Firstly, it cannot be said that the image of the dualistic Cathar doctrine, known from the polemics, was imposed by the Inquisitors: what speaks against it is the believers' poor, sometimes even negligible knowledge of heretical teachings. If any allusions to these teachings do come up, they often appear in a highly distorted and reinterpreted form, which is not at all compatible with the normative teachings of Catholic polemicists. Secondly, the image of Catharism that emerges from Inquisitional sources is an eminently chaotic image: it shows it as a community of believers who were very loosely associated with the heresy, who did not practice regularly, follow specific moral principles, or know its doctrinal principles—and even if they did know it, they chose to believe only what they considered to be right. Therefore, it is difficult to describe this group as an organized counter-church that could pose a threat to the Catholic Church. Thirdly, the scant awareness of dualism among the faithful is by no means evidence that dualism did not play a significant role in Catharism, or that it did not exist at all: this fact only confirms what Catholic authors have been saying for a long time—that the teachings were revealed only to a trusted few.

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